

Faithfulness and Generosity

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Date: 03 December 2017

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[0 : 00] Well, I don't know if you've noticed, but Prince Harry has been in the news quite a bit recently with the recent engagement. But there is one story that you may not have heard about. It happened just last September.

He was in deep conversation at a game of volleyball, I think it was, when a toddler next to him started stealing his popcorn. Have a look on the next slide.

And the newspaper dubbed her the popcorn poacher. Apparently this went on for quite some time before Prince Harry realised, and then he caught her on the next slide.

It was all a bit of fun, of course. Well, today we continue our series looking at the Ten Commandments. And as we do, we come to two commandments which are both about taking things that don't belong to you.

I was hoping that this would be our last one today so we could get into a mini Advent series. But RMIT were very keen to preach last week, and he did a good job. So we're kind of one week behind in our Advent series.

[1 : 09] So we'll look at the Ten Commandments this week and finish them off next week. But before we get to our two commandments today, just two quick reminders. The first reminder is that, as I've said before, we're not actually under the Old Testament law.

Jesus has set us free from it. And so at one level, we don't have to obey the Old Testament law, including the Ten Commandments. But nor do we then ignore them either, because Christ did not come to abolish the law either.

Rather, we can still read them and learn from them and indeed find application from them as well.

And so to that end, I gave you some questions which we'll follow again today in your outlines to help you remember how to read God's law and apply it for yourself.

The second reminder is that these commandments are again like topics. So we cannot just have our usual one passage and work our way through it. We're going to have to again do some Bible flicking today.

So we're at point one, which is the seventh commandment and Exodus 20 verse 14 on the screen. So the next slide. It's not a long reading, which is why I didn't do it today.

[2 : 21] Rather than have someone to stand up for two sentences, we had a different reading. But I'm also acutely aware that for some people, this will be a very sensitive topic because you have experienced or know people who have suffered from either adultery or divorce and so on.

So I thought I'd pause at this particular point and pray for us before we get into it. So let's pray.

Gracious Father, we do thank you for your word, including your Old Testament commandments to your people.

Father, we thank you that we can still learn from your word and still find application and meaning for us today. But we do pray for those amongst us who might be feeling this first one we're looking at today particularly acutely.

Father, we pray that you would help us to hear what it is you are saying in your word, to remember that there is forgiveness and hope in Christ and to be loving towards one another.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. So the commandment, as you can see on the screen, is quite straightforward. It says, you shall not commit adultery. In the original, it's literally just two words, not adultery.

[3 : 39] Now, strictly speaking, adultery is having a sexual relationship with another person's spouse or even fiancé. So, for example, in the next slide, we read from Leviticus 20 verse 10, that if a man commits adultery with another man's wife, the wife of his neighbour, you see, the wife doesn't belong to him and he doesn't belong to her, both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be

put to death.

Or on the next slide from Deuteronomy chapter 22, If a man happens to meet in a town a young woman betrothed, engaged to be married, and he sleeps with her, you shall take both of them to the gate of the town and stone them to death.

The young woman, because she was in the town and did not scream for help, and the man, because he violated another man's wife. You must purge the evil from among you.

Now, the reference there to not screaming is really another way of saying that she consented to have an affair. She didn't put up a fight. She went along with it.

If she did scream, by the way, there are different laws to protect her and provide for her. But notice, it's not just those who are married, it's also those who are betrothed, engaged.

[4 : 54] You see, adultery is having an affair with someone who does not belong to you, and whom you don't belong to them. Who is in a relationship with someone else. That's why when David commits adultery with Bathsheba, Samuel says, not, you've committed adultery.

He says, you have taken Uriah's wife. Taken what doesn't belong to you. And the real issue behind all this is unfaithfulness.

You see, by taking someone else who does not belong to you, then you're being unfaithful. The person that you do belong to, or you're creating unfaithfulness in someone else's marriage.

And God calls this evil. Even today, our world still calls unfaithfulness in marriage a scandal. And it makes the news. So earlier this year, on the next slide, September, I think it was, no, July, I think it was, AFL executives here in Melbourne had to resign over an affair they were having with co-workers.

And some newspapers, like the Australian here, called it a scandal. Sadly, this is becoming less of big news. Other newspaper journalists couldn't see what the big deal was.

[6 : 09] And so our society is moving again. But for God, the scandal is not so much the sexual act. After all, God created sex, and it's a good thing if used within marriage.

Rather, the real scandal is the attitude of unfaithfulness behind the adultery. And that's why when Israel is unfaithful to God, he calls their unfaithfulness adultery.

Because it starts with an attitude of unfaithfulness. So the next slide, in Jeremiah chapter 3, for example, this is what God says. Remember, Israel was the name of the northern kingdom.

They kept the name Israel. And in the southern kingdom, when it was divided, it was called Judah, after the biggest tribe. And that's where we get the name Jews from. So before the kingdom split, there weren't any Jews, literally.

It only came after Judah was formed. But anyway, God says, You have seen what faithless Israel has done. She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there.

[7 : 11] I thought that after she had done all this, she would return to me, but she did not. And her unfaithful sister, the southern kingdom, Judah, saw it. I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries.

Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear. She also went out and committed adultery. Because Israel's immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood.

The reference there to stone and wood is clearly referring to worshipping idols made of stone and wood. In other words, Judah was unfaithful by following other gods.

And notice God calls that adultery. Because at the heart of adultery is unfaithfulness. Don't get me wrong, the sexual act in adultery is terrible as well, but at the heart of it is unfaithfulness.

And so the antidote to adultery, the way to avoid it and protect ourselves against it, is faithfulness. Turn down to our first reading from Malachi, page 959.

[8 : 23] So if you've got your Bibles there, page 959. Chapter 2, verse 13. Here Israel are coming before God, but he will not listen to them. See verse 13.

Another thing you do, you flood the Lord's altar with tears, you weep and wail, because he no longer looks with favour on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. Why? Verse 14. Well, Malachi says, It is because the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant, he says.

You see, faithfulness matters to God, doesn't it? Such that unfaithfulness means he doesn't listen to Israel's prayers or takes their offerings.

Why does faithfulness in marriage matter to God? Well, four quick reasons. First, because God has made the married couple one. Verse 15 in your Bibles is, it's hard to translate.

[9 : 23] I'm not sure this particular version has it right. On the screen, I think is what the Hebrew is literally saying. He says, Has not God made them one, the married couple?

In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. You see, from the beginning in Genesis, we're told a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one.

One flesh. You see, in marriage, God designed the two to become one, and so faithfulness to your spouse matters because of who you are in God's sight.

You are one in God's sight. And so that's why faithfulness matters. That's the first reason. The second reason faithfulness matters is, verse 15, because God desires godly offspring.

I mean, God knows how hard it is to be a parent. If you've ever been a parent, you know the joys, the highs, but you also know the lows. In fact, if you've ever had anything to do with kids, whether nieces or nephews, or if you've ever had to babysit them, you often come away exhausted, don't you?

[10 : 27] Kids are hard work. And so having two parents makes it much easier. I don't know how single parents do it. I take my hat off to them. Even more importantly, though, is it's getting even harder to raise children to know and follow Christ, isn't it?

I mean, our state in Victoria is now known as the most progressive state in Australia. What an accolade. Which really means that it's the most morally regressive state in Australia.

And so having two parents who are both believers makes it much easier to have godly offspring, to raise kids to know and follow Christ. That's why as a church, we need to do what we can to support single parents or parents who only has one parent as a believer.

For God desires godly children. And because this is what God desires, then faithfulness matters, doesn't it? Of course, being faithful to each other and helping to raise godly children doesn't guarantee they'll stick with it, does it?

I know many couples at our church whose children have sadly wandered from the faith despite their upbringing. But if that's you, you never know how God might use the seeds that you've planted to bring them back later in life.

[11 : 45] So do keep praying for them. Pray that God might raise up people their own age to come alongside them. Because if you're a parent of those children, they don't listen to you anymore, do they?

Well, the third reason faithfulness matters is also for our good and the good of others. Because unfaithfulness, whether adultery or divorce, brings often shame for people, the person who commits adultery.

And it's almost, it's an act of violence towards your spouse. You see verse 16? The man who hates and divorces his wife, says the Lord God of Israel, does violence to the one he should protect, says the Lord Almighty.

So be on your guard and do not be unfaithful. You see, faithfulness to your spouse matters because ending up in divorce is like hating your spouse.

If you've ever been divorced, you know what it's like. It's not pleasant. And God says that the person who divorces their spouse is like committing an act of violence against them.

[12 : 52] Now, to be clear, there are some reasons why you might have to divorce. And we're given some of those reasons in the Bible. Though not every reason is covered. In fact, from Jeremiah, I don't know if you noticed, but God even gave Israel a certificate of divorce and divorced her.

So there are reasons why you might have to divorce, but it is always a tragedy. And it affects not just the couple, but the children, the friends, and the wider family, relatives, and even the church family.

And if you're the one who has committed adultery, it often sticks with you. So look at the next slide, Proverbs chapter 6. A man who commits adultery lacks judgment.

Whoever does so destroys himself. Wounds and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away. I remember back in 2009, there was a governor in America of South Carolina called

Mark Sanford, who was tipped to become the next American president, to take the mantle from Barack Obama, to take his second term away from him.

But then he had an affair. And in the press conference, Mark Sanford, the governor, said, the bottom line is this, I've been unfaithful to my wife. I've hurt a lot of people.

[14:13] And I'm going to be spending the next few days, weeks, months, and I suspect years, working through all the consequences. And a political reporter said that one of those consequences was losing the presidency.

That affair meant he lost the presidency. He had no hope of beating Barack. Interestingly, back then, Mark Sanford called himself a person of faith.

And listen to what he says about God's law, like this seventh commandment. Have a look, listen on the next slide. But I'm here because if you were to look at God's laws, they're in every instance designed to protect people from themselves.

I think that that is the bottom line of God's law. That it's not a moral, rigid list of do's and don'ts just for the heck of do's and don'ts. It is indeed to protect us from ourselves.

And there's truth in that, isn't there? He understood that God's law was there to protect himself as well as others. It's for our good, you see.

[15:19] Sadly, though, he did divorce his wife who had four children for his mistress. But now, they too are split up. It doesn't get better, does it?

And it's interesting that the articles I read about Governor Sanford today because after eight years, some people are saying and encouraging him to give Donald Trump a go. Because I guess they think anyone's better.

But articles I'm reading about him still mention his affair eight years ago, how he committed adultery. There is a sense in which the proverb is true, that his shame is never wiped away because he committed adultery.

Of course, if he truly repents, God will wipe away his shame in his sight and God will forgive. But the point is, faithfulness matters to God because he has made married couples one.

He desires godly kids because it's also good for people and for the family. And fourthly, it reflects God's very character of faithfulness as well.

[16:19] Now, before we think about how all this applies to ourselves, let's see what the New Testament does with this command. So we're at point two and we need to turn to our second reading in our Bibles, Matthew 5. So, it's page 969.

Jesus says, you have heard that it was said and then he quotes the seventh commandment, you shall not commit adultery. But I tell you, verse 28, that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Or it could be that anyone who looks at a man lustfully has already committed adultery in his, um, her, yeah, yeah, with the recent marriage vote, I'm just paranoid about getting the pronouns wrong. You get the idea. You notice again that Jesus gets to the heart of the command, doesn't he? He gets to the attitude behind the law, not just the letter of the law.

And for the Pharisees of Jesus' day, adultery, they just stuck to the letter of the law. And so adultery was when you, you know, literally had a sexual affair with someone you weren't married to. The classic Pharisee of our age is probably this guy on the next slide.

[17:30] Do you remember him? The classic Pharisee where he denied technically having adultery. He was unfaithful to his wife, of course. And Jesus says adultery really starts with the heart, the eyes, the desire.

It may or may not finish with the actual act, but it's all adultery. And so whether you are married or single or widowed or divorced, we can all fall in to this trap of adultery according to Jesus.

Now, please do not misunderstand Jesus in verse 28. Jesus is not saying that normal attraction is wrong. We were created to be attracted to the opposite gender.

It's what helps people to pursue marriage and have children and for the human race to survive. And so, you know, I can remember some girls talking about pride and prejudice, you know, that Jane Austen novel that they've turned to a movie and Mr. Darcy and when they see on the next slide this image of, yeah, that's it!

That's it! It's all right, my wife does the same. They go, oh, kind of thing. There's nothing wrong with that, right?

[18 : 42] What Jesus is, I'm going to quit moving on for your sake. What Jesus is talking about here is really desiring to have those who do not belong to you. That is, desiring to be intimate with someone who is not your spouse.

And in that instance, you are being unfaithful to the person who is or perhaps your future spouse but ultimately you're being unfaithful to God who has not made you one with that person, you see. But faithfulness matters especially to God. And so Jesus continues in verse 29 to 30. He says, if your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away.

It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It's better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Now Jesus is not telling us to literally cut off our limbs but he is telling us to take sin seriously so that we don't persist in it to the point of turning away from him and stumbling into hell.

[19 : 54] Notice here that Jesus talks about anything that causes us to stumble. He seems to broaden it but he says it in the particular context of sexual sin. He even uses the eye that we look with and the hand that we touch because sexual sin is one of those sins that is particularly powerful in ruining relationships including our relationship with God.

I mentioned a couple of weeks ago about a couple in my year at Bible College where it was a wife this time usually it's the husband sadly but it was sad either way but this woman started a flirtatious relationship with another guy who provided some sort of intimacy emotional intimacy with her and one thing led to another and she walked out on her husband and her two children and now no longer calls herself a Christian and according to Jesus she is in danger of hell.

Now theologically she may never have been a true Christian because God has promised to keep his chosen people to the end bring them to heaven but this is how he does it by warning us to take sin seriously warning us to be serious with what we watch on TV or the internet warning us to take seriously about where we find emotional intimacy and support because faithfulness matters to God and so we had to seek faithfulness people keep thinking the grass is green on the other side but as someone once told me quite rightly that the grass is greenest where you water it isn't it quite appropriate for today and that includes our relationship with God so whether you are married or not we had to be faithful to God for sin is serious and so we had to water our relationship through reading his word meeting with his people and depending on his help in prayer for faithfulness matters and whether we are married or not we had to seek faithfulness between our family and friends who are married

I know of some grandparents who traveled some distance from Melbourne to Perth to babysit their grandchildren so that their son and his wife could get help because their marriage was in trouble because they knew faithfulness mattered sadly people often wait too long to ask for help and often it's too late by the time you get there but do pray for your family and friends who are married and if you are married then we had to water the relationship with our spouse we had to work at it if I had more time I could give you some suggestions about how to do that I'm hoping also to run a marriage course next year but we had to remain faithful to our spouse for better for worse for richer for poorer in sickness and in health till death do us part and if we are in trouble then get help because faithfulness matters and if you've tried all that and you've still suffered divorce then do remember that God sees all he knows your heart and he still accepts you in Christ and he knows where the fault lies well the next slide is

Herbert and Zalmira Fisher who are in the Guinness Book of Records still I think for the longest married couple they've since passed away at the age of 105 and 103 years of age and they've been faithfully married for 86 years it's longer than a lot of people live for isn't it I asked Michelle how she'd feel about being married to me for 86 years she let out this whimper I think she was joking faithfulness matters doesn't it well I don't have time to deal with divorce more fully in verses 31 to 32 but I'm very happy to talk to people and it's probably a discussion best had one-to-one anyway rather let me briefly very briefly look at our second commandment for today which is point three and your outlines in Exodus 20 verse 15 on the screen here it says eighth commandment do not steal or again literally two words not steal now this is of course loving others by not taking what belongs to them as well although it's more than just a spouse it's taking animals or money like the other verses suggest and when the thief does that they are to pay back or they are to make restitution but stealing in the Old

[24 : 26] Testament was more than just taking something that did not belong to you it also included not giving what you owed so on the next slide from Leviticus chapter 19 we read do not defraud or rob your neighbor now do you notice how defrauding someone you know not giving them what you owe them and cheating them out of something it's equated with robbing them taking from them I remember my brother one day took his car to mechanic to get fixed and a few weeks later the problem returned and so he took it to a second mechanic and the second mechanic said oh here's the problem the other guy put in used parts and they've just fallen apart that's defrauding you know that's not giving the parts that he was supposed to give that's robbing my brother of his money you see now before we think about how it applies to us we need to again see what the New Testament says about this commandment and as we search the scriptures we come across

Ephesians 4 on the next slide where the apostle Paul this time rather than Jesus he broadens the command he begins at the top by a reminder by saying that now that we are God's people we've put off our old life and we've put on our new life to be like God he says you were taught you were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self which has been corrupted by its deceitful desires and to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self created to be like God to reflect his faithfulness if you like in true righteousness and holiness and then Paul continues to list some things that we had to put off and put on and so there on the bottom of the screen there one of the things is stealing he says anyone who's been stealing must steal no longer put it off but must work doing something useful with their own hands that they may have something to share with those in need it's pretty straightforward isn't it we're not to steal but to work for what we need if we're able to work and that means not stealing from the government by doing dodgy things to avoid paying tax nor stealing from artists by downloading illegal music which a lot of teenagers do nor from our employers in terms of stealing time or company resources and the like I once heard a story of a lady who became a Christian who was a cleaner and someone asked her look now that you're a Christian what has changed for you and she said I now sweep under the rugs too you see she had a Christian conscience which didn't try and defraud or take shortcuts not steal from her clients but give the service they paid for now for most of us I'm guessing that stealing isn't a huge issue but if you go back to the Ephesians 4 slide you'll notice that Paul broadens it not just to no stealing but working so that you may have something to share with those in need perhaps those who cannot work for themselves in others we have the opposite attitude of stealing instead of greed that takes we're to have an attitude of generosity that gives see it's not just don't steal it's don't steal and work to give whether it's to give to people in need who are amongst us or whether it's to give to people in need overseas by way of sponsoring children or the like or whether it's people in need of the greatest thing which is forgiveness in

Christ actually by giving to gospel ministry whatever it is we're not to be greedy and take we are to be generous and give and again be like God who was generous to us in his son and can I say I'm so encouraged by people here at HTD here at this service who do give you give to one another and you give to gospel ministry you are generous and so thank you for reflecting our father's generosity to us well while popcorn poaching as a toddler is not really a big deal even from a prince other forms of poaching are aren't they they are a big deal whether it's adultery with someone who does not belong to us with our minds our eyes or our hands or whether it's stealing or withholding something that does not belong to us it's all serious as Paul wrote on our last slide he says from 1 Corinthians 6 he says do not be deceived neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers that's defrauding will enter the kingdom of God it's serious isn't it but the great news of the gospel is that trusting in

Christ we can be forgiven as Paul writes in the second paragraph there and that is what some of you were but you were washed you were sanctified you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God so have you turned to Christ and put your trust in him because if you haven't then you cannot be washed clean have you turned from living your way to living Christ's way and if you have then we are washed clean by God's amazing grace and we can continue to be forgiven every time we repent and ask for forgiveness but what's more with God's help we are also to keep putting on that new self to be like God so that in our relationships we might reflect God's own faithfulness and generosity to us let's pray that we would let's pray gracious God we do thank you for your word which is given for our good and Father we thank you for these reminders today to seek faithfulness in our relationships and to be generous with what you've given us

[30 : 51] Father please be with those particularly who have suffered because people have been unfaithful to them please support them and uphold them and provide for them we pray and help us all to reflect your character of faithfulness and generosity towards us in Christ for we ask it in his name Amen m you you you